



## PRACTICE #1: RADICAL HOSPITALITY

**Scenario:** A young woman nervously stares at others in the church lobby with her baby. A coworker suggested your church, but she's self-conscious about her child's fussiness, wondering where the bathroom is, too embarrassed to ask for directions, and doubtful if this is the right church. How will she feel alone with her baby? She needs prayer, connection, and a way to rise above her job, finances, ex-husband, and children. First-time churchgoing is scary. Newcomers among

familiar faces are uncomfortable.

**Questions:** What could your church do to ease this kind of awkwardness? How enthusiastic would your membership be to engage and encourage her? What systems do you have in place to show her hospitality?

Do all of that, but do it **radically!**

### DEFINING HOSPITALITY

Thriving congregations practice Radical Hospitality. They invite, welcome, and include newcomers out of true love for Christ and others. They focus on individuals outside their congregation with as much passion as they nurture and grow those who already feel attached. They exceed all expectations with their inventiveness, energy, and effectiveness.

Hospitality means greeting strangers with goodwill and overcoming estrangement, distance, and the unknown with an open spirit. Christian hospitality shows a true love for others, an outward emphasis, a reaching out to the unknown, a grace that drives openness and adaptability, and a willingness to adjust habits to fit the needs and abilities of newcomers.

It means actively inviting, welcoming, receiving, and caring for strangers so they might find a spiritual home and experience the endless riches of life in Christ. Hospitality reveals God's heart.

### RADICALIZING HOSPITALITY

Radical means “drastically different from ordinary practice, outside the normal,” and so it provokes practices that exceed expectations, that go the second mile, that take welcoming the stranger to surprising new levels.

Radical means people offer their creativity, abilities, and energy to offer the gracious embrace of Christ to others. Churches characterized by Radical Hospitality are not just friendly and courteous, passively receiving guests warmly. Instead, they exhibit a restlessness, an unsettling awareness of those who need grace. They are genuinely curious about and interested in forming relationships with people outside the faith community. They are eager to carry Christ's initiating love into their daily lives.

## **RADICAL HOSPITALITY IN PRACTICE**

If you were planning a Vacation Bible School and someone asked what the purpose of the gathering was, here are a few potential responses you might hear –

1. We want to give the kids something fun to do over the summer.
  - a. But we can send them to the movies or an amusement park and accomplish this.
2. We want our children and grandchildren to learn the Gospel message and grow in faith.
  - a. Do we care about any children besides our own?
3. We want every child we can reach to learn the Gospel message and grow in faith.
  - a. How can we reach more children?
  - b. Are there unconventional opportunities to make it larger?
  - c. Do we need to change something about how we normally do it, to attract more people?
  - d. What are we willing to do, spend, or offer to ensure that this happens?

## **QUESTIONS FOR YOUR MEMBERS AT HOME:**

- How did you first hear about this church?
- What was your first experience here like?
- What made you feel welcome, or what made it hard to connect?
- Why do people need this particular congregation?

## **FURTHER READING**

Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations: Revised and Updated by Robert Schnase (pp. 35-39, 45-46).



## PRACTICE #2: PASSIONATE WORSHIP

**Scenario:** People unfamiliar with churches see worship as boring, religious, judgmental, impenetrable, poorly designed, empty of meaningful substance, irrelevant, and full of confusing symbols, outdated references, and music from a bygone era. Or they think worship is a slick, self-serving spectacle. There is seldom anything in between those two extremes.

Fruitful faith groups worship passionately. Passionate Worship connects people to God, one another, and the world around them. People eagerly gather as the body of Christ, encounter Christ through singing, prayer, scripture, and Holy Communion, and respond by letting God's Spirit influence their life. God-formed lives generate faith communities with uncommon warmth, graciousness, and belonging.

**Question:** How could we deepen our worship life to make our services more compelling, and life-changing?

Do all of that, but do it **passionately!** It's time to experiment with a greater variety of settings and expressions of worship so that we can form relationships with people who are unlikely to step into a church building. Let's learn to take worship to places where people naturally gather and engage them more deeply.

### DEFINING WORSHIP

Worship is gathering to encounter God. The people of God cultivate their relationship with God and each other. We worship to merge our lives with God's. Worship allows us to focus less on ourselves and more on God's activity and will, whether in a chapel or a living room. Worship needs trust to recognize what God accomplishes, not what others do.

Worship transforms lives, heals wounded souls, renews hope, shapes decisions, provokes change, inspires compassion, bonds with people, and prepares them to serve their neighbor. Worship prepares us to be God's hope and grace ambassadors in the community.

### MAKING WORSHIP PASSIONATE

Passionless worship is dry, uninteresting, and predictable. Leaders' poor planning, worshippers' disinterest, lousy music, and unclean facilities make church an obligation rather than a joy. Interpersonal strife can also disrupt community worship, exhausting members and leaders.

Leaders' self-promotion makes some services seem insincere. When people attend out of responsibility, respect, or genuine affection yet wish they were elsewhere, services can feel like funerals. Services may feel like a poorly organized public meeting due to the many announcements, jokes, digressions, and stories that have little to do with the theme.

Passionate means passionate desire, impassioned spirit, powerful feelings, and heightened importance. It implies an emotional bond beyond intellectual consent. It generates an urge to honestly glorify God with excellence and remarkable clarity about connecting people to God.'

Passionate Worship is alive, authentic, fresh, and engaging regardless of attendance. People are truthful and receptive to God. People will change their life to worship this way.

## **PASSIONATE WORSHIP IN PRACTICE**

Evaluate everything you're doing in the context of worship and determine whether there are hindrances to connecting with God. Seek ways to move people from critical analysis to active participation.

## **QUESTIONS FOR YOUR MEMBERS AT HOME:**

- Are we offering the best of ourselves to God in worship?
- Are people connecting with God and each other when we meet?
- In what creative ways can we engage more people to participate in worship?
- What creates a sense of expectancy for me as I prepare for worship?
- Are we missing opportunities to connect more people with God by only meeting here? At this time? With this group?

## **FURTHER READING**

Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations: Revised and Updated by Robert Schnase (pp. 62-70).



## PRACTICE #3: INTENTIONAL FAITH DEVELOPMENT

**Scenario:** One person new to faith struggled to study the Bible even with the plans on his mobile phone Bible app. Then he decided to make his plan “public,” letting other users, his friends at church, and his family, see his progress. He said he never missed a step, and his sister got more regular in her study because she saw her brother’s progress. A friend also reported being more inspired. He was amazed at how his accountability inspired others.

Followers of Jesus mature in faith by learning together in community. Faith communities that practice Intentional Faith Development offer a variety of high-quality learning experiences that help people understand scripture, faith, and life in the supportive nurture of caring relationships.

**Question:** What opportunities does your church provide for faith development?

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Do all of that, but do it **intentionally!** Christian disciples strive to develop faith and grow in Christ-likeness through study and learning, and God is best able to form disciples when people do this together. This is where God’s Spirit works in us, perfecting us in the practice of love as we grow in the knowledge and love of God. Growing in Christ requires more than weekly worship.

### DEFINING DEVELOPMENT

Jesus taught His disciples in community. As they listened to Jesus's parables, commands, and lectures around dinner tables, on hillsides, and at the Temple, his disciples learned about God and God's will for their life.

Jesus taught us to study our faith with people from varied backgrounds. The disciples listened to Jesus's stories with strangers, including "bad" individuals. At those dining tables, they rubbed elbows with despised, reviled people.

God's Word and faith communities teach us about Christ's life and will. We can best grow in faith by joining a learning, listening, and serving community. Bible study and faith sharing are about actively opening ourselves to God's Word and call. God transforms via relationships.

As Christians, learning in community provides support, encouragement, and direction. As we consciously appropriate faith stories with others, we learn that our questions, doubts, temptations, and errors are normal and part of the path.

We are encouraged to think differently about God and live our faith. Others assist us interpret God's Word for our lives, countering self-referential or narcissistic interpretations that reinforce our current lifestyles, attitudes, and actions.

## **ADDING INTENTIONALITY**

Intentional Faith Development describes the practice of congregations that view the ministries of Christian education, small-group work, faith-forming relationships, and Bible study as absolutely critical to their mission. They consciously and deliberately cover the whole age spectrum, fostering faith development during the year for children, youth, young adults, singles, couples, and various aged adults.

They study and analyze the demographic makeup of people in their community, noting people's shared interests, anxieties, and lifestyles, and create ways to meet people wherever they are, spiritually and in everyday life.

They actively seek ways to develop opportunities for study, discussion, and growth with and for people outside the congregation—in coffee shops, fitness centers, sports gatherings, public parks, and wherever people gather. They examine their efforts to offer radical hospitality and passionate worship to the broader community and find ways to create all sorts of small communities for fellowship and study.

## **QUESTIONS FOR YOUR MEMBERS AT HOME:**

- When has God used a small community of Christians studying and praying together to encourage you?
- Would you be interested in joining (or hosting) a small Bible discussion group?
- Is our church providing convenient and meaningful opportunities for you (or people like you)?
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## **FURTHER READING**

Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations: Revised and Updated by Robert Schnase (pp. 92-96, 99-100).



## PRACTICE #4: RISK-TAKING MISSION AND SERVICE

**Scenario:** A couple began to experience a particularly strong urging. It was a question, nagging and persistent: Where do the homeless people in our community go each day? Who are they? Where do they find shelter? They had seen people who had no homes, but when they asked around, they were told, “there are no homeless in this city.” The couple kept asking questions and eventually learned why, technically, that was true. Most of the homeless were routinely picked up and taken outside the city limits and left there.

**Question:** What gap has your church identified in your city, and how did you fill it?

Do all of that, but do it **risky!** What’s the opposite of risk-taking? Safe. Predictable. Comfortable. Certain. Convenient. Fearful. These words do not describe the ministry of Jesus Christ!

Mission and service are often self-contained offshoots of the local church; events one could sign up for, like you might sign up for a shore excursion as part of a cruise—an excursion, not the main journey. For any congregation seeking to be fruitful, those days are over. Radical Hospitality, Passionate Worship, and Intentional Faith Development all lead to and are fueled by Risk-Taking Mission and Service.

### DEFINING MISSION AND SERVICE

Over three thousand years of faith history emphasizes selfless service to others. Offering oneself in God's name to change people's lives is vital to faith and the church's purpose.

The word **mission** turns our **servicing** outward and reminds us that Christ's compassion, kindness, mercy, and love extend to the entire world and are cultivated not only in the church or among those regularly seen and recognized.

Bible characters served God by serving others. Jesus' stories show God's love for the poor, sick, outcast, and vulnerable to society's oppression. No congregation or disciple can escape God's command to love and serve others, which emerges naturally from Jesus Christ's teachings. Service is the lifeblood of a faith community.

### GETTING RISKY

Bringing together people from different countries, backgrounds, and even neighborhoods of a city with their wealth, power, and other disparities is perilous. Paternalistic and patronizing attitudes can ruin good intentions; ideas of cultural supremacy poison honest learning; uninformed and insensitive comments, dominant personalities, and self-righteous attitudes create chasms between people, making issues worse.

However, well-executed programs improve lives. Teams of volunteers build homes, churches, parsonages, wheelchair ramps, clinics, medical services, paint schools, dig wells, widen roads, and teach youngsters. They create genuine connection, listening, and learning by focusing on relationships and people rather than materials and buildings. Risk-taking mission and service needs transparency and vulnerability, which seems risky for everyone. Stretching hurts.

"I didn't cry when the water destroyed my home," claimed a woman who lost practically everything in a flood. But when I saw people traveling from so far away to help me clean up and rebuild, I couldn't stop crying." Nothing is harder than a lonely fight, and finding those who care enough to help, offer their time, work hard, and sacrifice is a grace. It transforms people. Everybody serves.

Hands-on mission and service transform both sides. After helping others, no one views life the same. We discover brightness in our lives when we listen and learn about the individuals we serve and are open to new experiences and ideas. Our values and habits change. Misconceptions are revealed. We acknowledge our wastefulness, materialism, and luxury.

Missions alter churches. Even when a tiny fraction of members engage in significant mission and service, church life changes, and service and outreach become goals and dialogues. Mercy and justice grow. Tolerance grows, youth activities go beyond parties, movies, games, beach trips, and amusement parks, and these ministries focus on impacting lives for Christ.

## **QUESTIONS FOR YOUR MEMBERS AT HOME:**

- When have you witnessed someone offering a costly demonstration of unexpected love? How was God at work in what happened?
- What does the phrase *"to equip the saints for the work of ministry"* (Eph 4:12) mean for this church?
- Are you willing to step into greater uncertainty, a higher possibility of discomfort, resistance, or sacrifice if it means that God is pleased with you?
- Are you open to receiving help? Are you open to giving help?

## **FURTHER READING**

Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations: Revised and Updated by Robert Schnase (pp. 123-125, 128).





## PRACTICE #5: EXTRAVAGANT GENEROSITY

**Scenario:** Most Pioneers and Boomers operate in subscriber mode. Just as they pay for the newspaper whether they read every issue or not, they tithe to the church whether they attend each week or not. Their giving comes from a sense of duty, ownership, loyalty to God and the institution, and commitment to the community. Younger generations, however, are more likely to give according to the pay-per-view mode. They give when they're in church and don't give when they're not.

**Question:** What is your church doing to increase individual giving so that your church can increase its corporate giving (e.g., missions, increasing ministry, etc.)?

Do all of that, but do it **extravagantly!**

Generosity enlarges the soul, realigns priorities, connects people to the body of Christ, and strengthens congregations to fulfill Christ's ministries. Giving reflects the nature of God. Growing in the grace of giving is part of the Christian journey of faith, a response Christian disciples offer to God's call to make a difference in the world.

### DEFINING MISSION AND SERVICE

Christians of all walks of life—janitors and teachers, factory workers and small business owners, maids and executives, lawyers and farmers, wage earners, and retired folks, doctors and work-at-home moms—some with incomes so small that it's difficult to imagine how they manage to give anything at all, and others with resources so large that their faith community can't absorb their generosity, causing them to direct their charitable impulses toward clinics, colleges, new church starts, and social service agencies.

People who give generously do so because they genuinely desire to make a positive difference for the purposes of Christ and because they want to align their lives with higher purposes. They give in response to the Spirit's urging and feel a soul-sustaining satisfaction in the sense of meaning and connection that comes with generosity. They give because they love God, love the church, and desire to grow in love of neighbor.

### GOING OVERBOARD

Fruitful congregations give extravagantly. They promote proportionate giving and practice tithing. As a faith community, they generously fund missions, outreach ministries, and organizations that touch lives and inspire people to grow in giving as a Christian discipleship practice.

Instead of starving from poverty, these congregations thrive on excess. They donate joyfully, liberally, and consistently to nourish souls and grow the church mission. As people grow in their relationship with Christ, they practice Extravagant Generosity, giving more of themselves for Christ and providing the resources that strengthen the ministry and help the church transform more lives as God has transformed theirs.

Extravagant Generosity churches speak confidently and sincerely about money, giving, generosity, and the difference giving makes for Christ and the giver. They honor God by appealing to the highest life-enhancing reasons for giving rather than fear, guilt, pressure, and disgrace. They talk about joy, devotion, respecting God, and spiritual growth that increases charity. They encourage people to give God their best without apologizing, whining, groaning, or feeling awkward.

Giving is fun. Pledge campaigns are about mission, spiritual growth, and God. Stewardship strengthens prayer, community, purpose, and mission. Giving strengthens and blesses Christians.

Extravagant congregations prioritize mission, purpose, and life-changing results over shortages, finances, and institutional loyalty. They inspire joyful giving to change lives and find purpose, meaning, and fulfillment. They know that God inspires giving to find purpose and serve Christ. They link money to mission.

### **QUESTIONS FOR YOUR MEMBERS AT HOME:**

- How has someone else's generosity touched you and shaped your practices of giving?
- From whom did you learn generosity?
- Who continues to influence you toward greater generosity?
- What's the most fun you've ever had giving money?
- Are you willing to grow your personal giving incrementally to reach the tithe as a goal?

### **FURTHER READING**

Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations: Revised and Updated by Robert Schnase (pp. 146-149, 150-152).